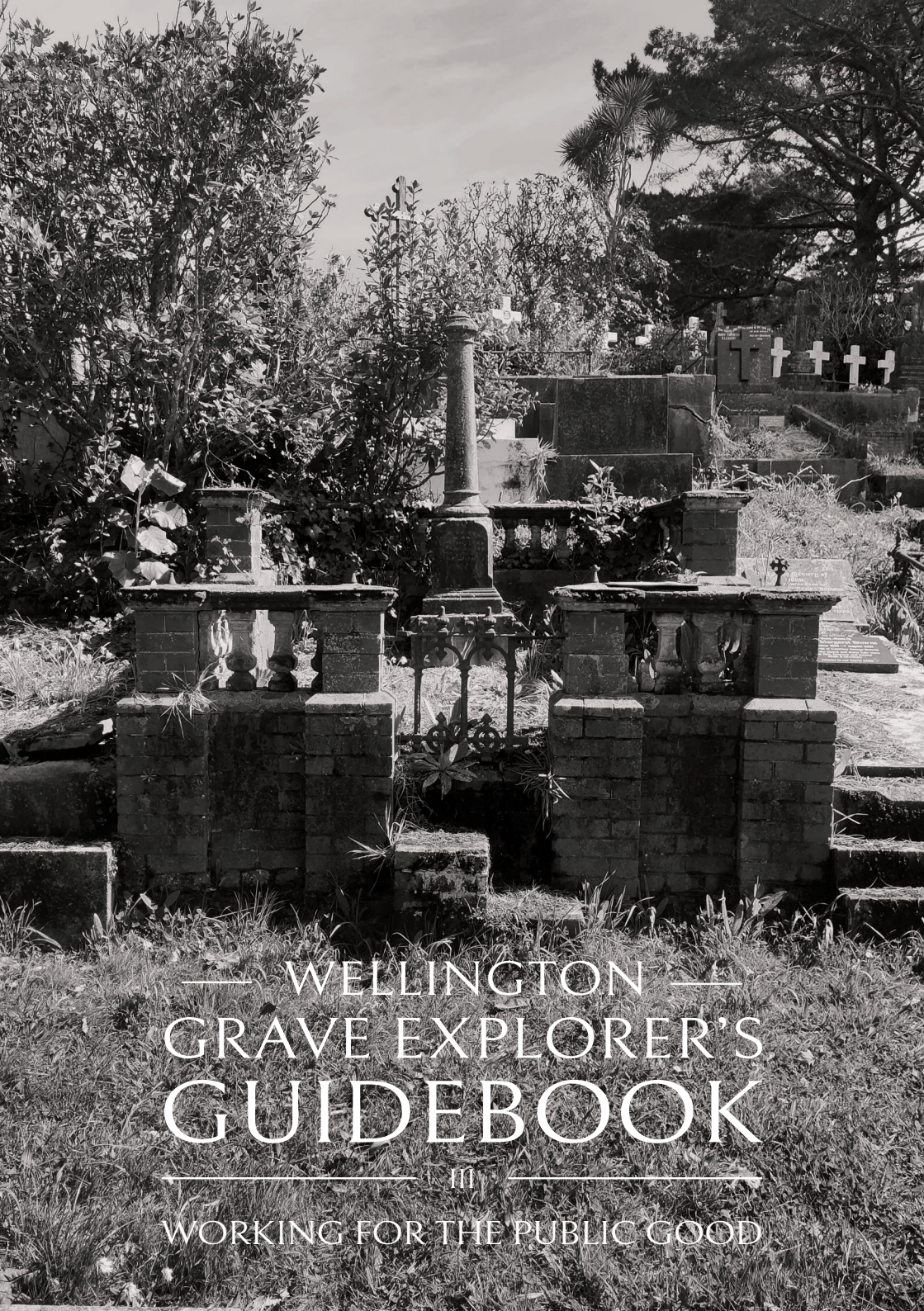


WELLINGTON GRAVE EXPLORER'S GUIDEBOOK

III

WORKING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Made by Andrew McCauley in 2023.

All biographical information sourced from Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand (teara.govt.nz) and New Zealand History - Nga Korero a Ipurangi o Aotearoa (nzhistory.govt.nz).

Thanks to the staff at Karori Cemetery for helping me track down some of the harder to find graves.

If you have any corrections, concerns or suggestions about the information in this guidebook, or you'd like to work with me on a future one, get in touch at graves.of.wellington@gmail.com.

Welcome to the Wellington Grave Explorer's Guidebook. It's part of a series that exists to help you to explore local cemeteries and find out a little bit about some people from our local and national history.

This third issue takes you through Karori Cemetery looking at some of the figures from the history of New Zealand's public service.

When I say 'public service' I'm using the term broadly to encompass people across the state sector including government departments (some of which would later become State Owned Enterprises or Crown Entities, or be sold off to the private sector), local councils, and the public health system.

It's a follow-up to the last issue I made, called 'Bureaucrats'. When I started that one I soon came across more people than I could fit in one tour, so I decided to split the list across two separate guidebooks.

So while issue #2 was mainly based around on the south side of Karori Cemetery, the majority of graves in this issue are clustered on the northern side nearer to the Seaforth Terrace entrance.

This guidebook includes scientists, administrators, engineers, medical professionals, and communicators. I wanted to talk about these people because the work they did for the public good was important in creating the foundations of the society we live in now - just like the valuable work that people across Aotearoa continue to do today will influence generations to come.

At the time of writing this we're in the lead-up to the 2023 elections, and conservative politicians are using public servants as a punching bag in the same tired and dishonest way they do every election cycle. I want the stories in this guidebook to be a reminder that the people who work in service to their communities can do impressive things if they have the chance - which comes from having leadership that's willing to invest in their work.

Just like last time, I want to stress that because I'm working from Te Ara (the New Zealand Encyclopedia) and the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, the people covered in here skew towards the well-known: people who led departments and in some cases would be the equivalent of today's CEOs. The fact that these are the people who make the history books obscures the fact that all over the public sector there will have been all kinds of everyday people in everyday jobs who made a difference to the country we live in today, in ways that might be smaller scale or less direct but are collectively just as valuable. I hope to learn more about some of those people and be able to share some of their stories in the future.

SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Be warned, exploring the graves in this guidebook involves going over some uneven and slippery ground.

When I was looking for some of the graves it had been raining for the last few days and some of the ground was pretty muddy. The paths can also get pretty mossy and slimy, especially in the more shaded areas, and the leaf litter can be slippery on concrete paths and steps, especially the ones that aren't flat.

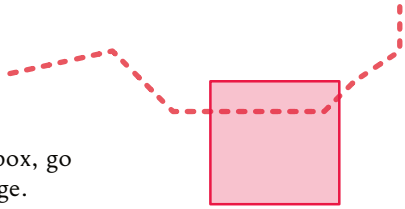
So I'd suggest picking a day with decent weather and not after a lot of heavy rain. And be careful where you step.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

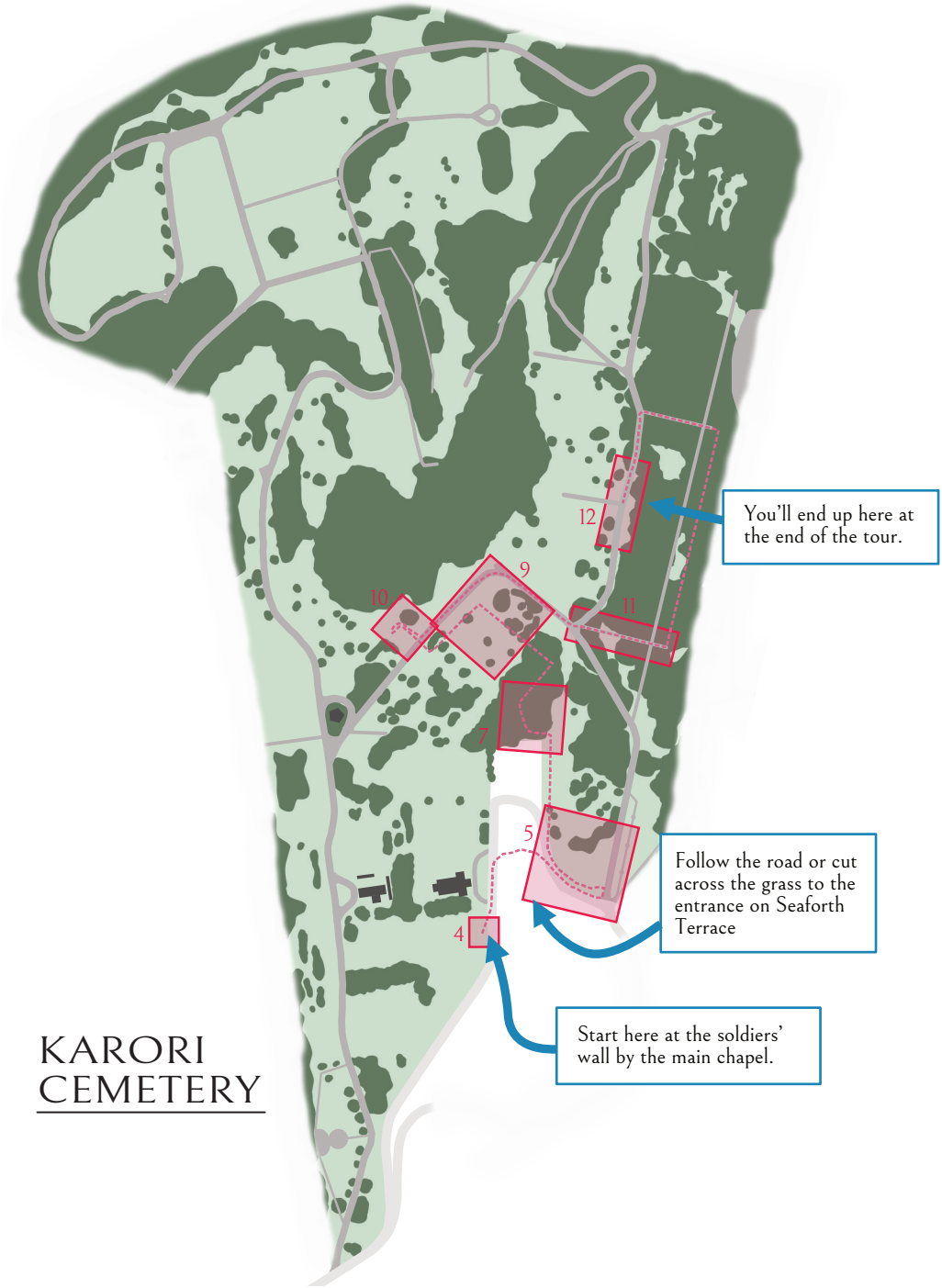
On the opposite page you'll find a map of the cemetery showing you the full tour route.

Follow the dotted line around the cemetery.

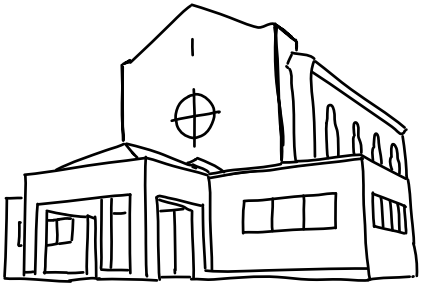
When you get to a red box, go to the corresponding page.



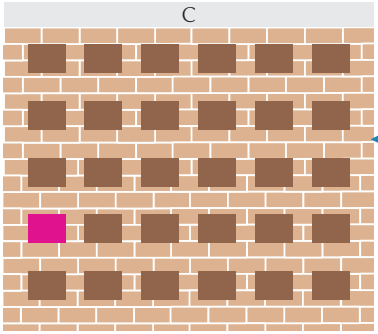
There you'll find information about a particular person, and more detailed instructions about how to find their grave, which will be marked pink.



KARORI CEMETERY



Start outside the main chapel on Rosehaugh Avenue. To the left of the chapel is a long brick wall along the boundary of the cemetery.



Lizzie's plaque is in section C, the third section of the wall from the chapel.

Lizzie's plaque is the fourth one from the top, in the furthest left column in the section.

(LIZZIE) IDA GRACE WILLIS

Lizzie was a nurse, medical administrator, and leader within New Zealand's nursing system.

She'd been working as a private nurse until she was stranded in Fiji on holiday by the outbreak of World War One. She joined New Zealand Expeditionary Force when it stopped in Fiji on its way to Samoa, and she spent ten months nursing in Apia. She later went to Egypt, England and France as part of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service caring for soldiers in the war.

Following the war she returned to New Zealand and worked at Featherston Military Camp through the influenza epidemic.

For 20 years she worked as assistant inspector of public hospitals before becoming principal nurse, then matron in chief, of the NZ Army Nursing Service. That role meant that when World War Two broke out she was responsible for coordinating the operations of around 650 New Zealand nurses in New Zealand and around the world.

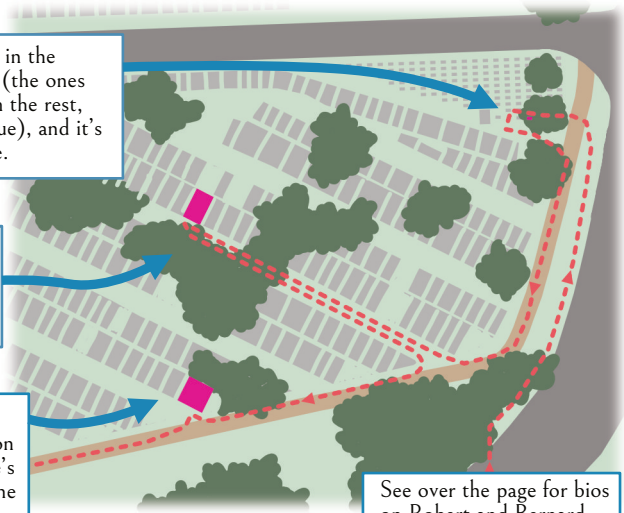
ERNEST MARSDEN

Ernest was one of Aotearoa's leading scientists and science administrators. He studied physics under Sir Ernest Rutherford, and worked with Hans Geiger (as in the geiger counter) on a paper about particles emitted during radioactive decay that became recognised as one of the crucial experiments of twentieth-century physics.

From 1922-26 he was the assistant director of education, where he focused on improving scientific and technical education. When the state scientific research sector was reformed in 1926 he was appointed secretary of both the newly created Scientific and Industrial Research Council and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). He was also responsible for the Geological Survey, Dominion Laboratory, and Dominion Observatory, and later the plant research division that had been part of the Department of Agriculture.

During World War Two he developed a radar programme to support the Allied war effort.

After he stepped down from his role he became the DSIR's scientific liaison officer in London - kind of an unofficial science ambassador. He was an advocate for nuclear energy and for the use of nuclear science in industry, agriculture and medicine. But his studies of radioactive fallout later in life led him to become an opponent of nuclear weapons and their testing.



Ernest Marsden's plaque is in the furthest row from the path (the ones that's on an odd angle from the rest, next to a much bigger plaque), and it's the fifth one from the fence.

Robert Edwin's grave is the 20th from the end on this row here with a curved brick wall at the end.

Bernard Aston's grave is the first one on this row. His name isn't on the big black headstone but there's a big 'ASTON' on the front of the concrete boundary of the plot.

See over the page for bios on Robert and Bernard.

ROBERT ATHERTON EDWIN

Robert started working for the Marine Department in 1871 as an examiner of masters and mates, which is someone who trained and certified people to work at sea. In that job he was also required to undertake marine surveying and supervise compass adjusting, and was put in charge of weather reporting and storm-signalling division.

In 1874 he proposed - and volunteered to set up - an expanded scheme of weather forecasting and storm warnings; up until that point there had been a system of sharing weather information by telegraph, but Robert introduced a recently developed technique from the Royal Navy that involved a network of weather stations with barometers.

From then on he was responsible for the country's weather forecasts for over 30 years. By the time he retired in 1909, daily forecasts were being sent to over 90 towns as well as to newspapers and lighthouses.

He also published several scientific papers on forecasting methods and atmospheric circulation.

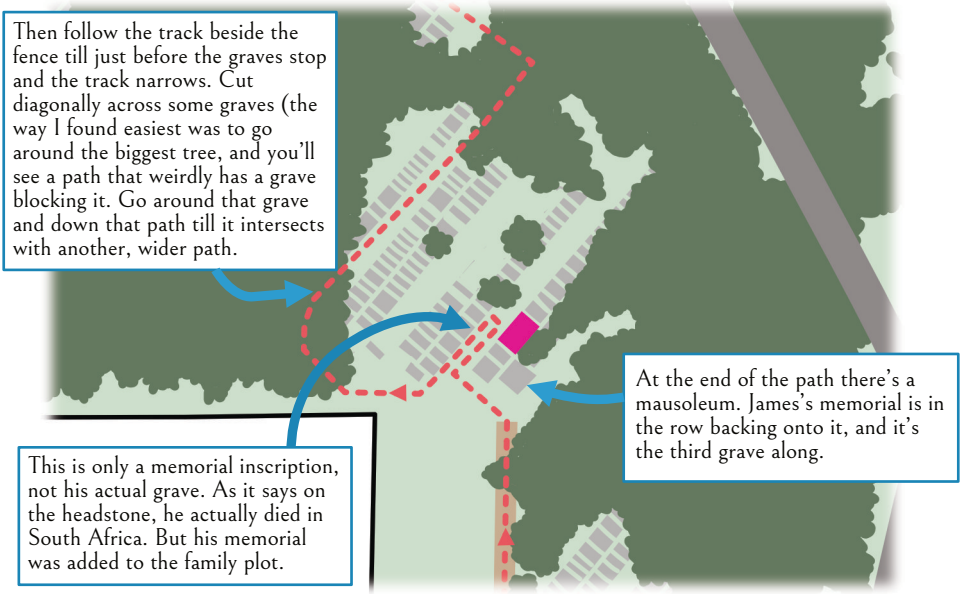
BERNARD CRACROFT ASTON

Bernard was an agricultural chemist with the Department of Agriculture from 1899 - 1936.

During his time there he made a big contribution to agricultural science. He set up the department's first lab for testing export butter in New Plymouth, and carried out a bunch of scientific investigations into wheat, dairy products, animal feeds, grasses and soils.

He also carried out studies identifying toxins in native plants (like tutin, the poison sometimes found in honey), and his work in animal nutrition was important in establishing the link between cattle health and soil minerals. He later administered a programme of funding for research on animal nutrition and pasture health.

He also did a whole lot of ecological and plant distribution studies, and helped survey the Tararua track.



JAMES LOGAN

When James first arrived in New Zealand in the 1860s he worked on installing long-distance telegraph lines. He was in charge of the Tokomairiro to Queenstown line where he experimented with innovative methods to make the lines more suitable for the local conditions.

When the telegraph lines were taken over by the government in 1869 he became inspector of telegraphs for Dunedin. In his 24 years there he introduced a whole lot of innovations, like replacing wooden telegraph line poles with iron ones, and using the newly invented telephone as a way of extending the telegraph network's reach to areas where having a permanent telegraph operator wasn't feasible.

From 1894 he became the national superintendent of electrical lines. In that job he oversaw the installation of new cables across the Cook Strait, the introduction of machines that transcribed morse code into holes punched in paper tape, the introduction of copper wiring, and the placement of the first trans-Pacific cable. He also oversaw a seven-fold increase in the number of telephones across the country, and laid the legislative foundations for state radio broadcasting with the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1903.

JOHN EWART

John was the superintendent of Wellington Hospital from 1889 to 1909. He was the person in charge of the running of the hospital, and for the first 14 years of his time there he was also the only resident doctor.

He ran the day-to-day operations of the hospital during a time when the public health system was establishing itself. While he was there the hospital expanded significantly with new surgical theatres, a nurses' home, and isolation wards for infectious diseases.

He was described as a good administrator and record-keeper, a good surgeon, and a good employer. He introduced aseptic treatment practices to better prevent the spread of pathogens, and improved the level of training for nurses. Wellington's fever hospital was renamed after him.

He later went on to be the chief medical officer for the New Zealand Railways.

HORACE FILDES

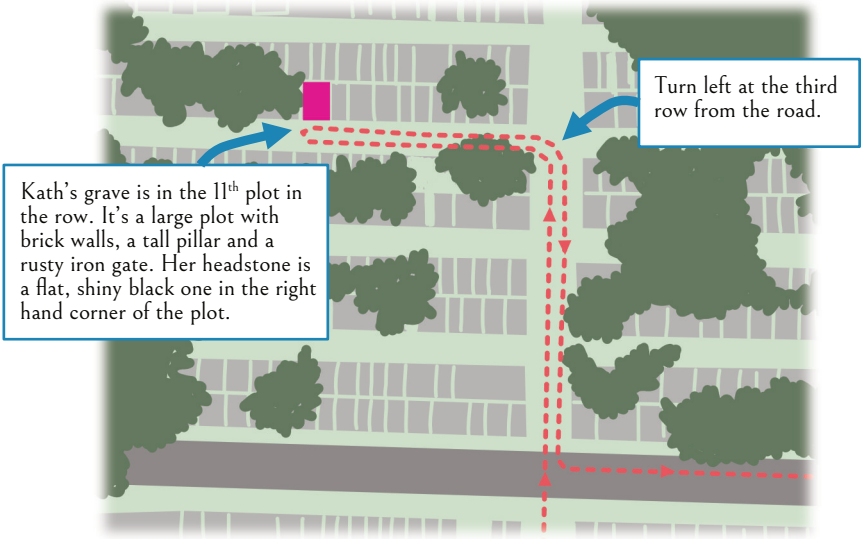
Horace worked for the Post and Telegraph Department for about 35 years from 1893-1929. During his working life he spent time as the chief postmaster in Westport, and assistant chief postmaster in Christchurch and Wellington.

It's his outside-of-work contribution that is most notable though. He had an interest in collecting and indexing books and papers on early New Zealand history and literature.

He spent years establishing a collection of books and papers, and indexing references within them into bibliographies that he used to help historians with their research - and to provide unsolicited corrections to historians that made mistakes.

When he died he left almost 2000 volumes of papers to the Victoria University Library, and over 120 prints and paintings to the Dominion Museum.

Carry on along the row to get to the next section. It can be kind of slippery though, so if you want a steadier path you can go along the road instead.
Horace's grave is in the second-to-last row before the road. It's the third grave on your left.
John's grave is in a row that has a really big plot on the corner with a bunch of crosses on it.
John's grave is the 9th visible plot along this row. It's completely unmarked: no headstone, no concrete border. Just a lot of gorse and weeds. To the left is a grave with a big cross, and to the right is a grave that has HARRY written in big tiles.



MARGARET KATHLEEN O'BRIEN

Kath was a film director who made informational public programming for the National Film Unit, a state-owned film production facility.

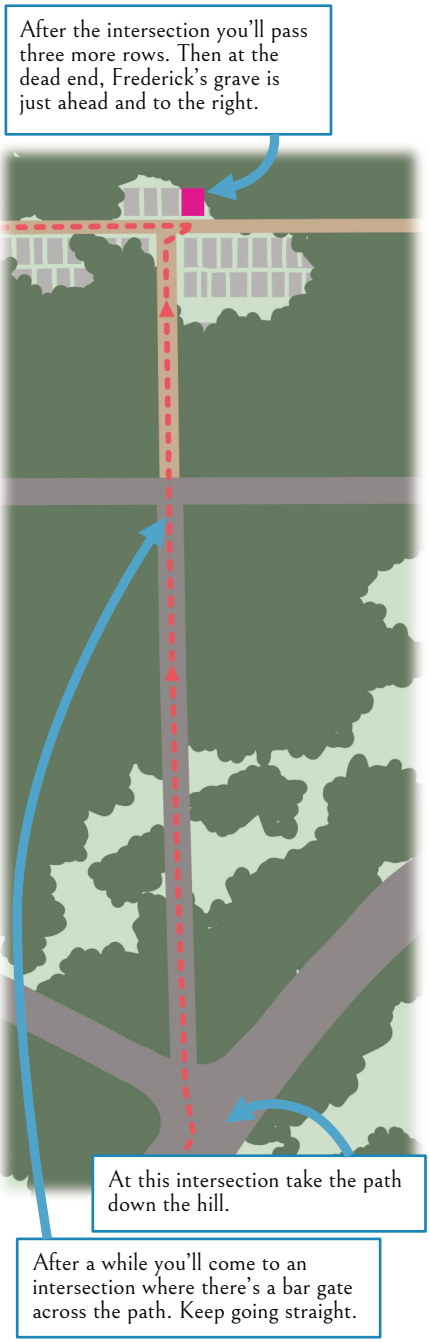
She started working at the Film Unit as a sound librarian in 1946, but quickly got trained up as a director. She made her first film in 1947 which showed behind-the-scenes workings of the Film Unit.

For most of the 1950s and 60s she was the only woman making films in the Film Unit and one of very few making films at all.

In her roughly 23 years at the Film Unit Kathleen made 16 films, several of which were good enough to get selected for international film festivals.

She covered educational topics like food handling, road safety (including one with chimpanzees demonstrating safe cycling), district health nurses, ballet dancers, and student life at Massey Agricultural College She also made tourism promotional films on a couple of New Zealand cities.

Her final film in 1966 was a documentary on Polish war refugee children, including interviews with those children as adults.



FREDERICK FURKERT

As an engineer in the Public Works Department Frederick supervised the construction of the south end of the main trunk railway in the lower North Island, which opened in 1908. He then worked as district engineer for Otago and Southland, where he worked on a building a bunch of significant irrigation schemes and railway lines.

During World War One he was in charge of the construction of military camps at Trentham, Maymorn and Featherston.

From 1920 he was engineer in chief and under-secretary of the Public Works Department. He was involved in preparing the legislation for the main highways system, and was responsible for the first major hydroelectricity projects in New Zealand.

After his public works career ended he helped establish the New Zealand Standards Institution in 1932 and became deputy chairman of the Standards Council, where he was part of developing specifications for a standard code of building by-laws.

LAWRENCE BIRKS

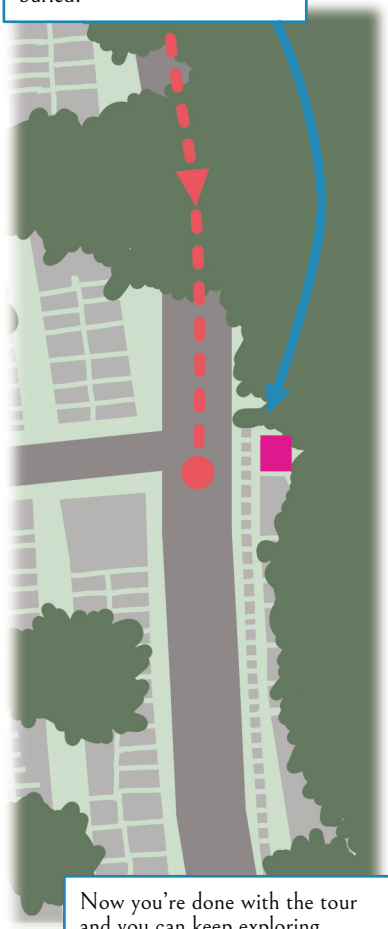
Lawrence was an electrical engineer who was central to establishing Aotearoa's network of renewable energy generation.

He came to New Zealand in 1903 to work for Christchurch City Council installing its first steam-powered electricity generating plant. He worked briefly on the Christchurch tram network, and in Rotorua extending the local hydro-electric power scheme.

In 1910 he was tasked with preparing a report for the government on electricity demand, and this report led to the government giving the go-ahead for New Zealand's hydro-electric power scheme. He was appointed assistant electrical engineer for the Public Works Department from 1911, and then chief electrical engineer from 1919, where he was one of the two people responsible for establishing, planning and supervising the development of New Zealand's national hydro-electricity network.

He supervised the construction of the Lake Coleridge scheme, and hydro dams at Mangaaho in the Tararua ranges and Arapuni on the Waikato River. He also toured the country advocating for the uptake of electricity.

Opposite the intersection there's a row of little headstones, and behind that a row of big plots. The plot with a big tall pointy obelisk in red stone is where Lawrence is buried.



Now you're done with the tour and you can keep exploring.